

# PRESS RELEASE

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## MEPs REJECT EU BIOTECH RESOLUTION

### 2007 off to a bad start for GMO industry

DUBLIN, 13 March 2007 – MEPs voted yesterday to delay a controversial draft Biotech Resolution in the European Parliament, to allow more time for the agriculture committee to scrutinise it.

The vote came within hours of BASF's announcement that it has given up its plan to release 450,000 GMO potatoes in Co. Meath, for which the EPA gave its consent last year.

GM-free Ireland Network spokesman Michael O'Callaghan welcomed the news, but warned that the Minister of Agriculture, Mary Coughlan, still plans to publish her strategy "to ensure the co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic agriculture" after the General Election. "This would open the floodgates for the GM invasion of Ireland to begin", he said.

The EU Biotech Resolution by liberal Finnish MEP Kyösti Virrankovski called for the Parliament to recognize the "benefits" of genetically modified (GM) food and crops, and for an end to "discrimination" between GM and conventional crops. GM crops are grown on only 2.6% of the world's farmland.

The decision was taken following European-wide opposition from MEPs and citizens of all political persuasions. The final blow was delivered by the Socialist group, the second-biggest in parliament, which said the resolution: "needs more debate to be better balanced and flexible." The cross-party vote deals a blow to the European Commission's effort to boost biotechnology at a ministerial meeting in June that will set new targets for its use.

Almost no GMO crops are grown commercially in Europe, apart from two areas of Spain where GMO maize has rapidly contaminated conventional farmers, organic farmers and the seed supply.

Agribusiness biotech industry lobbyists complained that the Commission "should calculate the negative effect on employment and competitiveness of delay" and also called for "compensation for patent holders who could not get national governments to allow planting".

But Friends of the Earth Europe released a report yesterday which shows that environmentally-friendly farming will create more jobs and make the EU more competitive than if it grows GM crops. [1]

FOE spokesperson Helen Holder said "If we want to develop a competitive and dynamic economy in Europe, then it would be wise to quietly shelve the idea of genetically modified foods and put our political support and tax-payers' money behind green farming methods."

According to the Financial Times, early drafts of an EC Joint Research Centre report due next month admit that GM crops accounted for just 0.08 per cent of gross value added in the agricultural food industry and 0.02 per cent of jobs in the EU. There is virtually no market for GM food in Europe, where GM-labelled produce is banned by Europe's 60 largest food brands and food retailers, and refused by 70% of consumers. [2]

Irish MEPs who oppose GM crops include Liam Aylward (FF), Brian Crowley (FF), Barbara De Brun (FF), Proinsias De Rossa (Labour), Marian Harkin (Independent), Mary Lou McDonald (SF), and Kathy Sinnott (Independent).

Liam Aylward and Mairead McGuinness are both members of the European Parliament Committee on Environment and Rural Development, which delayed the resolution yesterday. Liam Aylward opposes Fianna Fáil's pro-GMO reversal of the party's 1997 campaign pledge never to allow the release of GM crops in Ireland, and said he would have called for the resolution to be rejected if it had come to be voted on in the Parliament as originally planned tomorrow.

Mairead McGuinness of Fine Gael contributed pro-GMO amendments to the original draft text of the resolution (thus contradicting the "Green Ireland" GM-free policy adopted by Fine Gael late last year). But after seeing the film, The Future of Food [3] (which the GM-free Ireland Network sent to

every TD and MEP for Christmas), Ms. McGuinness privately said she was "horrified" by the numerous problems caused by crops and that they should never be released. Her current position on the issue is unclear.

The GM-free Ireland Network has written to all Irish MEPs asking them to call for new EU legislation that recognises the democratic legal right of its member states and regions to have the final say on whether to allow the release of GM crops in their area.

Michael O'Callaghan said Ireland's geographical location will give us the most credible GMO-free food brand in Europe, if our government would follow the lead of the other EU member states which have already established total or near-total bans on GM crops. "This would provide the Irish food, farm and tourism sectors with a significant competitive advantage. Irish farmers who avoid the use of GM animal feed are already securing multi-million Euro foreign direct investment deals and higher premia in the domestic and export beef and dairy markets. Mary Coughlan's daft "strategy" to allow the release of GM crops in Ireland will destroy this opportunity for ever, since contamination incidents in 40 countries prove that GM crops can not "co-exist" with conventional and organic farming, and can never be recalled after their release."

### **2007 off to a bad start for GMO industry**

- BASF announced yesterday the permanent cancellation of its proposed GMO potato experiment in Co. Meath. The UK Department of Agriculture and Food company gave its consent for the experiment to take place at two sites in England, but one of these has been withdrawn by the landowner. Also last week the Netherlands Council of State judged in an appeal by Greenpeace that field trials of BASF's GM potatoes in Holland had been illegally permitted by the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and Environment and destroyed the permits immediately. And the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) banned all planting of BASF's supposedly non-GM Clearfield131 rice last week, because it was found to be contaminated with unknown GM genes.
- Monsanto's GM alfalfa seed was outlawed in the USA yesterday by a Federal Judge following his decision that the U.S. Department of Agriculture failed to prepare a full environmental impact statement before approving the crop last year. In February, a French court levied US \$19,000 fines on Monsanto and Scotts France for misleading the public about Roundup, Monsanto's flagship herbicide. One of the groups to which damages also must be paid stated that the court decision, "puts an end to Monsanto's lies." A former chairman of Monsanto Agriculture France had claimed that Roundup is biodegradable and "left the soil clean." Roundup's active ingredient is glyphosate. According to a June 2005 report in Environmental Health Perspectives, Roundup was found to be "...toxic to human placental...cells within 18 hours [of exposure], with concentrations lower than those found in agricultural use," and, "Roundup is always more toxic than its active ingredient." The researchers also found glyphosate and Roundup effects on sexual hormones at very low levels. This suggests that "dilution with other ingredients in Roundup may, in fact, facilitate glyphosate's hormonal impacts.
- The US Patent and Trademark Office rejected a key patent in Monsanto's Roundup Ready arsenal last week, possibly stripping the agribusiness giant of its power to license the technology to farmers. The decision followed a lawsuit filed by the Public Patent Foundation, which said that Monsanto has used the patents to "aggressively try to bankrupt farmers or put them out of business.
- A US federal district judge ruled in February that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) must halt approval of all new field trials until more rigorous environmental reviews are conducted. Citing potential threats to the environment, Judge Harold Kennedy found in favor of the Center for Food Safety that USDA's past approvals of field trials of herbicide tolerant, genetically engineered bentgrass were illegal.
- In India, the Supreme Court banned any new GM crop trials until further notice, with the exception of a GM mustard seed containing the extremely controversial engineering "Terminator" gene that renders the seeds from the plant sterile.
- A one million-name petition was presented in February to the EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou by Greenpeace, calling on the European Commission for GMO labeling on milk, meat and eggs. The petition was collected in twenty-one states of the European Union between May 2005 and December 2006.

- 41 of the world's biggest food exporters, processors and retailers issued written commitments to stay GM free. The worldwide tide of opposition is reflected in the new Greenpeace report, "Rice Industry in Crisis".
- Three untested and illegal varieties of American GM rice have escaped into the food chain, causing a collapse of the \$1bn US rice export industry and numerous class action lawsuits by contaminated farmers who can no longer sell their produce. The rice is produced by Bayer CropScience.
- U.S. federal judges in three separate cases have asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to examine genetically engineered crops more closely last month. The courts said the department had violated the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) in approving commercial sales of transgenic alfalfa and field trials of turf grass and plants engineered to produce pharmaceuticals.
- A secret feeding study of Monsanto GM potatoes, conducted in 1998 by the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences Institute of Nutrition and suppressed for 8 years until its publication in February, showed that the GM potatoes did considerable damage to the organs of the rats in the study
- An article published on the Russian MK news-based website last week revealed how independent researchers working in the GM field are systematically marginalized, threatened, intimidated, patronized, denied access to raw materials for their experiments, and starved of funds when they find things that are "inconvenient" to the GM corporations.
- In California, a bill has been tabled to make companies developing GM crops liable for damages if their work results in contamination of other crops.
- In February, EU member states the third time snubbed the European Commission by backing a national ban on genetically modified maize products - in this case Hungary - which Brussels says is against international trade rules.
- The London-based Institute for Science in Society issued a report last week that the European Food Safety Authority and the UK Food Standards Agency have been ignoring the precautionary principle, manipulating and corrupting science, sidestepping the law, and helping to promote GMOs in the face of massive public opposition and damning evidence piling up against the safety of GM food and feed.
- The EU's food and drink industry called on the Member States' governments to take action on halting price rises for their supplies, as more crops are diverted for biofuel production (which the GM industry plans to exploit with GM biofuel crops).
- Yes Books announced the forthcoming publication of "Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods" by US researcher Jeffrey Smith. In his foreword, former UK government environment minister Michael Meacher says, "This is the authentic book on genetic modification that the world has been waiting for... The case presented is absolutely a smoking shotgun that should stop in its tracks any dabbling with GM foods, whether by individual families, food companies, or indeed nations."

## CONTACT

Michael O'Callaghan, Coordinator, GM-free Ireland Network:  
 Tel: + 353 (0)404 43885 • Mobile: + 353 (0)87 799 4761 • Email: [mail@gmfreeireland.org](mailto:mail@gmfreeireland.org)  
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org>

## NOTES TO EDITORS

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 Full report: [http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE\\_biotech\\_MTR\\_midlifecrisis\\_March07.pdf](http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE_biotech_MTR_midlifecrisis_March07.pdf)
2. New setback for biotech crops in Europe, Financial Times, 13 March 2007.
3. The Future of Food: <http://www.thefutureoffood.com>